

MICHAEL V. O'BRIEN
CITY MANAGER



CITY OF WORCESTER

April 12, 2005

TO THE WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILORS:

I am very pleased to provide this report regarding a responsive interagency collaborative and action plan to reduce the incidence of panhandling and related concerns in the City of Worcester. Following months of research and program development, more than twenty-five organizations, including public, private, and non-profit partners have signed on and are committed to participating in this initiative through a combination of direct and indirect support.

As you will note in the attached report from Jill C. Dagilis, Commissioner of Code Enforcement, the goal of this plan is twofold; 1. To provide an extensive community education campaign that defines and supports the solutions to positively address the complex challenges associated with panhandling and 2. To provide a comprehensive system of social service/treatment response strategies and enforcement strategies to address the needs of and impact of the individuals who panhandle.

This plan, currently underway, is a comprehensive and compassionate approach that supports the solution--to work collectively on the root causes of poverty, by enhancing the capacity of the agencies that help with homelessness, hunger, and substance abuse recovery. Worcester's efforts must continue and be strengthened with supportive local and state policies, targeted programs, sufficient funding, inter-agency collaboration, and a constant focus on these complex community challenges and opportunities. Worcester citizens are known for their generous and giving spirit. It is that very spirit and compassion that I believe will be the foundation for the success of this important effort.

I extend a warm, heartfelt thanks to these dedicated partners for their participation and to the broader community in anticipation of their supportive response.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael V. O'Brien
City Manager



Jill C. Dagilis
Commissioner

CITY OF WORCESTER

Department of Code Enforcement

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Worcester

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All-America City

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1981 - 2000

David F. Holden, P.E.
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Michael V. O'Brien, City Manager
FROM: Jill C. Dagilis, Commissioner of Code Enforcement
DATE: April 8, 2005
SUBJECT: Action Plan to Reduce the Incidence of Panhandling

Pursuant to your request, the following report outlines the action agenda designed to reduce the incidence of panhandling and related concerns in the City of Worcester. Given your prior review and approval of this plan, strategies defined herein have begun and will continue throughout the year.

This initiative is the culmination of many months of planning through collaboration with a broad network of community partners. The goal of this public-private, interagency plan is twofold: To provide an extensive community education campaign that defines and supports the solutions to positively address the complex challenges associated with panhandling, 2. To provide a comprehensive system of social service/treatment response strategies to address the needs of the individuals who panhandle. The effort must be grounded in a responsive, holistic, and compassionate approach.

1. Both the national research and the local social service agency partners advise that we must educate those who give money directly to people who panhandle that this is not the solution, unfortunately it exacerbates the problem. Tragically, seven out of ten people who panhandle will use the money to buy drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes. Worcester has proven that it is a generous and giving community, particularly to those in need; citizens open their hearts and their wallets in an effort to help. There is a better way to help.
2. Redirecting these same donations to targeted social service/treatment response systems is the solution. This approach strengthens the capacity of the agencies to provide food for the hungry, shelter and housing for the homeless, mental health support services, and substance abuse recovery services for those challenged by addictions. A program is in place to receive and direct these funds to the service agencies.

Core objectives include:

- Development and implementation of a 12-month multi-faceted public education campaign with strategies that include print (newspapers, magazines, brochures),

intervention service models, and a clinical case research study on behavioral interventions—*Contingency Management Interventions: From Research to Practice*.

Many public, private, non-profit, and community partners have joined this effort and are committed to providing direct and indirect support to address the complex issues associated with panhandling. Partners agree that these efforts must be focused in two areas—educating the public on the disadvantages of giving money directly to individuals who panhandle, and redirecting those same funds to local agencies that offer appropriate services and intervention programs. This method supports the solution—to work collectively on the root causes of poverty, by enhancing the capacity of the agencies that help with homelessness, hunger, and substance abuse recovery. Worcester's efforts to address these challenges can certainly be met, as demonstrated by and through proven programs from across the country, with thoughtful legislative policies, targeted programs, sufficient financial support, inter-agency coordination, dedication to the issue, and time.

The foundation for this plan was triggered by Worcester Police Chief Gary Gemme's December 13, 2004 report to city council that defined the need for an inter-agency, community response approach. A subsequent report submitted by City Solicitor David Moore delineated the possible use of zoning ordinances to restrict or prohibit panhandling. Both reports referenced the national review and various problem resolution approaches cited by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) guide #13 entitled *Panhandling*, by Michael Scott. Chief Gemme's report and the COPS research notes that *"the problem of panhandling is often times tied to the related issues of homelessness, unemployment, minor and serious crime, public inebriation, alcoholism, and substance abuse...the Department of Justice cautions and emphasizes to local communities that law enforcement alone is seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. The police can and should be a partner, but a community wide effort of collaboration is needed to address this quality of life issue."*

The COPS guide describes an array of strategies that have been tested and implemented across the nation, including enforcement, public education, social service treatment/response, situational responses, and the creation of new laws or ordinances.

Worcester's Community Response

I am pleased to report that the Worcester initiative is built upon a strong, and widely supported community model that includes an extensive network of partners: the City of Worcester through the City Manager's Executive Office, Department of Public Health, Worcester Police Department, Office of Human Rights, Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Executive Office of Neighborhood Services, Disabilities Office, Veterans' Services, the Worcester Government Access Channel, Grants Acquisition, Department of Code Enforcement, Law Department, Treasurer, Department of Public Works, the Worcester Public Library, and the Worcester Public School Department in partnership with AIDS Project Worcester, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Centro Las Americas, Charter Communications, Clear Channel Outdoor, Colleges of Worcester Consortium, Community Healthlink, Family Health Center of Worcester, Friendly

House, Great Brook Valley Health Center, Henry Lee Willis Center, Jeremiah's Inn, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles, Massachusetts Veterans Shelter, PIP/SMOC, Salvation Army, United Way of Central Massachusetts, Vocero Hispano Newspaper, Worcester Community Action Council, Worcester County Ecumenical Council, Worcester County Food Bank, Worcester Publishing Ltd., Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Worcester Regional Transit Authority, WTAG/WSRS, Worcester Telegram and Gazette, and YOU Inc.

Interagency Service Response Plan

Several local social service agencies, included in the aforementioned list of partners, are collaborating on an interagency service response plan to support the solution via outreach to the individuals who panhandle.

These efforts will be augmented with additional shelter and housing, food, substance abuse recovery/treatment, information and referral, employment and training, fuel and food stamp assistance, and transportation services as needed. The collaborative effort will include an interagency model of outreach, intervention, and harm reduction strategies that are designed to respect the dignity and the rights of the individuals who panhandle while addressing the complex root causes of poverty, homelessness, hunger, and substance abuse recovery.

The Worcester Police Department, an integral partner in this problem-solving approach to panhandling safety and intervention, is committed to providing prompt response to calls regarding aggressive panhandling. Further, an individual, as protected under civil and freedom of speech rights, may stand along a public way (e.g., sidewalk). However, people who panhandle can not: block your way on a street; follow you after you say "no"; verbally threaten or insult you; or approach you in a group of three or more. In the case of aggressive panhandling, citizens should call the **Worcester Police Department 911 emergency line**. Further, if a citizen wishes to call and **report the incidence of a person passively panhandling, the First Call for Help** line should be used **(508) 755-1233** for social service agency assistance/intervention.

It is important to note that "tag days"--fundraising stand out events at local intersections--are allowed upon the completion and approval of a permit filed with the Worcester Police Department. The police department is committed to ensuring that the tag day events are properly permitted, supervised, and follows safety protocols for optimum pedestrian and traffic safety.

Community Education and Support for the Solution

The Worcester community education program has begun. All efforts will focus on asking donors who give their change to individuals who panhandle to contribute to a comprehensive and proven solution via local non-profit charities and service organizations. The **United Way of Central Massachusetts' First Call for Help telephone line (508) 755-1233** is taking calls to direct charitable donations to the partner

agencies that provide the direct services and outreach to individuals who panhandle. Giving money directly to these individuals is not the solution; most often, the change given is used to buy cigarettes, alcohol or drugs. Caring and responsive services--via the local agencies--includes shelter or housing, meals, counseling, medical services, employment opportunities, transportation, and more—is a proven solution with far greater success and impact.

Broadly disseminating this important message in ways that the community, motorists, individuals, and organizations can help is key. As such, many public, private, and non-profit organizations from all sectors have signed on to enhance the public education strategies.

The educational outreach program and the list of community partners committed to supporting this strategy are both extensive. Beginning with the distribution of a one-page informational flyer in the April and May excise tax bills (18,500+) with additional inserts scheduled for the future, then expanding to print and broadcast media coverage, billboards, posters, street sign postings (along routes and intersections where panhandling frequently occurs)—spring 2005, and bus placard advertisements, the plan also includes monthly information sessions and leaflet/poster distribution with the higher education and faith communities, as well as citywide business and neighborhood watch groups and the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles.

Attached for your reference is a copy of the brochure being distributed citywide. A special thanks is extended to the many individuals and organizations that responded so positively and assisted with the development of this important community service program. Collectively, we are very optimistic that the broader community will support this effort.

Should you need additional information, please advise.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jill C. Dagilis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Jill" is written with a large, looped initial "J". The last name "Dagilis" is written in a similar cursive style.

Jill C. Dagilis
Commissioner of Code Enforcement



Panhandling is not the Solution!



If you think your spare change is helping, think again. There is a better way to help.

**Support the solution not the problem.
Give to a local charity.**

For a listing of local charities please call:

**FIRST CALL
FOR HELP**

(508) 755-1233

When does a person who panhandles cross the line? People who panhandle cannot:

- block your way on a street.**
- follow you after you say "no."**
- verbally threaten or insult you.**
- approach you with a group of three or more.**

Aggressive panhandling should be reported to the Worcester Police - call 911.

This community service message is brought to you by the City of Worcester, in partnership with: AIDS Project Worcester, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Centro Las Americas, Charter Communications, Clear Channel Outdoor, Colleges of Worcester Consortium, Community Healthlink, Family Health Center of Worcester, Friendly House, Great Brook Valley Health Center, Henry Lee Willis Center, Jeremiah's Inn, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles, Massachusetts Veterans' Shelter, PIP/SMOC, Salvation Army, United Way of Central Massachusetts, Vocero Hispano Newspaper, Worcester Community Action Council, Worcester County Ecumenical Council, Worcester County Food Bank, Worcester Publishing Ltd., Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Worcester Regional Transit Authority, WTAG/WSRS, Worcester Telegram & Gazette and YOU Inc.